

INTRODUCTION

Overview

The Cultural Collaborative (TCC) is a plan for San Antonio's creative economy. The creative economy is the economic expression of the creative, or arts and cultural community. The Cultural Collaborative is innovative in planning for the entire spectrum of San Antonio's creative community—its nonprofit arts and cultural organizations, its creative businesses, and its creative individuals (see page 12). TCC research finds that more than nine of ten San Antonians of all backgrounds participate in arts and cultural activities, and they naturally weave them throughout their personal and work lives. The Cultural Collaborative is among the first national plans to recognize and support this integration. The TCC encompasses recognized arts institutions as well as the equally vibrant undercurrent of cultural activity flowing throughout the community—nonprofit and commercial, professional and community-based, institutional and individual.

The Cultural Collaborative is also San Antonio's vision for its cultural future. It was developed through more than a year of intensive community participation and planning. An 86-member Steering Committee of community leaders, representing the creative

"We must get away from thinking of San Antonio as a small town. We need loftier visions."

Digital Media Cluster meeting participant

community and other sectors of San Antonio, oversaw and participated in the planning process. Beginning with the November 2003 conference, Finding Ways: A Conference on Art, Culture and Economic Development, more than 1,000 individuals and organizations participated directly, providing their insight and suggestions in interviews, focus groups and community forums. Wider input was gathered from a community-wide opinion survey and an economic impact study. To gain additional perspectives, the planning team also compared San Antonio to other cities and examined models from other communities. Collectively, the process yielded consistent, clear messages about the type of creative community San Antonians desire and the ways they want to achieve their vision.

TCC aims to achieve groundbreaking and far-reaching results for San Antonio. It will grow the creative sector of the economy, generating desirable new jobs and businesses. It will support thriving cultural districts and activities both downtown and in the neighborhoods. It will promote arts education in schools and expand cultural opportunities for young people throughout the city. And it will reinforce the authentic way of life, both traditional and contemporary, that San Antonio prizes so highly.

The Cultural Collaborative is a living document and its implementation a dynamic process. The pace of change in the world is not only faster but also less predictable. The plan is designed with a flexible framework that, as its name implies, activates a broad array of partnerships among nonprofits, businesses, government and community leadership. It also anticipates that these people and organizations will creatively adapt the strategies of the plan to the changed circumstances they will certainly encounter.

Vision, Goal and Objectives

Planning meetings brought about many hours of discussion and lively exchange of ideas resulting in the development of a vision, goal and set of objectives that describes the type of community that participants would like to strive towards and direct The Cultural Collaborative implementation.

The **vision**:

Because the creative expressions, both traditional and contemporary, of our diverse cultures and communities nourish us all, the people of San Antonio are committed to the expansion of resources, leadership, and infrastructure to support a healthy creative economy that benefits residents and visitors alike.

The **goal**:

To support the growth and recognition of San Antonio's creative economy.

This goal emphasizes the importance of San Antonio's creative economy and the creative community that comprises it—its nonprofit arts and cultural organizations, its creative businesses, and its creative individuals. The creative community is a major, yet under-recognized sector that is valued by San Antonians and attractive to visitors. It also has great potential to contribute further to the community if recognized as a critical industry.

The planning process identified ten focus areas for consideration:

Advocacy and outreach	Creative individuals	Resources
Arts and cultural infrastructure	Cultural and heritage tourism	Vital neighborhoods
Arts and culture in education	Cultural equity	
Civic aesthetics and public art	Economic development	

Investigation of these issues resulted in the development of five primary **objectives** in support of the plan's goal:

Access: *to provide greater access to the arts and culture to residents throughout San Antonio*

Economic Development: *to promote the economic growth of San Antonio’s creative sector*

Community Awareness: *to increase community awareness of the role and value of all San Antonio’s arts and culture*

Authenticity and Creativity: *to strengthen San Antonio’s unique and diverse culture, heritage and architecture*

Resources: *to develop increased resources of all types*

Note that in addition to the overall vision for TCC, the Executive Committee developed detailed vision statements for ten focus areas in the planning process (see page 79).

Cultural Equity

Throughout the planning process, cultural equity was a constant topic of interest for the TCC Executive Committee (see roster, page 87) and other planning participants, such as ethnic-based arts and cultural organizations, making it clear it should be addressed throughout the Plan. The Executive

“The schools focus on European art; we need more attention to Chicano art and culture.”
Youth Focus Group participant

Committee defined cultural equity as an ongoing goal that includes the shared value of mutual respect for diverse cultures and the fair distribution of resources among cultural communities. The West Side Arts Coalition of San Antonio also expressed the need to ensure that future cultural equity policies include the critical role and achievements of ethnic-based arts and cultural organizations. Ensuring cultural equity is a fundamental value of The Cultural Collaborative, applying to all five of its objectives. Accordingly, one of the TCC strategies is to develop and adopt a cultural equity policy for both TCC and the City of San Antonio (page 52) to serve as a guiding principle for TCC-related initiatives. Cultural equity is also discussed specifically in the Access section (page 26).

The TCC Executive Committee had two focused discussions on cultural equity and developed several foundational ideas that were later infused in a vision statement to help guide future policies. (The statement can be read along with the other vision statements for the TCC focus areas on page 79.) Pablo Martinez, writer and member of the TCC planning team, prepared the following statement, which eloquently describes San Antonio’s aspirations for cultural equity.

“To begin working toward the goal of cultural equity, present-day realities, as well as historical facts, must be carefully considered. Cultural equity, then, is something to which San Antonio aspires—it cannot be a blithely made assumption.

Just as certain forms of equity between individuals are founded on an abiding belief in the dignity and worth of every individual, so too must equity between and among groups of individuals whose work addresses cultural expressions recognize, value, respect and support diverse expressions with fairness, sensitivity and understanding.

Cultural equity also implies a fair distribution of resources, not only to artists and arts organizations (i.e., the not-for-profit sector of a creative economy), but also to the communities they serve and in which they reside. This aspect of cultural equity helps insure that what is fair and right is compellingly evinced in equal access and widespread cultural participation.

Given the constantly evolving nature of culture (here broadly defined), it follows that cultural equity must be constantly championed and protected, the same as any other basic right, tenet or resource.

Through a vigorous affirmation of cultural equity, San Antonio would boldly demonstrate a keen, fair and forward-looking vision for cultural expressions, their sources and their support systems, the critical bedrock of all creative environments.”

The Creative Community

The Cultural Collaborative adopts an expansive, inclusive definition of San Antonio’s creative community, but not one that is unlimited. TCC includes all individuals, businesses and nonprofit organizations in San Antonio that directly or indirectly produce cultural products or services. It also includes thinkers and doers trained, whether formally or informally, in specific cultural and artistic skills.

“Talented people are drawn to or stay in communities with visible signs of diversity. Diversity is the breeding ground of creativity and the source of economic growth.”

*Dr. Richard Florida,
Finding Ways Conference
Keynote Speaker*

Following generally accepted definitions in the field, TCC equates the creative community with a broad view of “the arts and culture.” This includes fine arts as well as popular, ethnic, commercial and design arts. TCC also includes cultural events, such as festivals and celebrations, concerts and dances in the parks, and the preservation of history and heritage within its purview. Another key aspect of San Antonio’s creative community is the “undercurrent” of cultural activity and people that has generally gone unrecognized. Outside of San Antonio’s nonprofit cultural institutions, “creatives” run clubs that are major music venues, produce poetry slams and independent films, and promote individual artists of all disciplines. These people and activities have previously “flown below the radar”—TCC specifically includes their interests within its strategies. Nonetheless, it is clear that TCC is not a plan for all cultural forms, such as religion,

science or the environment, but recognizes that art and creativity inherently inform these areas in a profound way.

The TCC Executive Committee discussed its understanding of arts and culture to focus the planning process for the San Antonio community. The committee detailed the breadth and subtleties of San Antonio's arts and culture, which is largely informed by the contemporary ramifications of its Mexican/Mexican American heritage and extensive cultural diversity. San Antonio's arts and cultural leaders embrace a broad and relativistic notion of the arts, rejecting past perceptions of valuing some art forms more than others. Rather, they value what is essentially "artistic" about all art forms. They also include many aspects of culture within their definition, including "shared expressions," "expressions of tradition," "way of life" and "invention." For example, TCC planning included a focus group on hip hop culture whose participants eloquently described the history and scope of hip hop, and its importance to the creativity of many young people in San Antonio.

"Arts" has traditionally meant the fine arts: visual arts, music, literature, theater and dance. Choreographer Liz Lerman, winner of the 2002 MacArthur "Genius" Award, describes the shift to a contemporary definition as a vertical hierarchy becoming a level playing field. Using the dance field as an example, ballet used to be on the top of a pyramid, with folk dance and hip-hop on the bottom. Now we see all art forms on the same level, having similar value but different focuses. Similarly, we now include in our definition of "arts" such art forms as crafts, ethnic, traditional, popular and electronic or digital arts.

"Culture" is most often defined in anthropological terms. A standard textbook definition is:

"The system of shared beliefs, values, customs, behaviours, and artifacts that the members of society use to cope with their world and with one another, and that are transmitted from generation to generation through learning." Bates and Plog, Cultural Anthropology, McGraw Hill: 1990.

This is a very broad definition, one that extends far beyond the boundaries of even an expansive definition of the arts. The field of the arts and culture draws an indistinct circle around its central territory of the arts, and acknowledges other cultural expressions on a case-by-case basis. Community context is one useful key to determining what is a part of "the arts and culture." As one TCC planning participant noted, Charlotte, North Carolina, is the regional home of stock car racing and the NASCAR circuit. Charlotte views this racing as a cultural form and offers tours and events celebrating the races, racing history and the community's "racing culture." The San Antonio equivalent might be the Lowrider Festival, the San Antonio Stock Show & Rodeo and Charreadas.

San Antonio is clearly a community with a rich history and heritage, including a large and well-preserved collection of historical buildings and places, such as its historic theaters and five eighteenth-century missions. Planning participants agreed that this heritage and built environment are special, even unique to San Antonio, placing the cultural territory of heritage and historic preservation within the purview of The Cultural Collaborative.